

WORD OF THE LORD

Rev. Dr. Talmage's Sermon on the Threshing Process.

WITH THE STAFF AND ROD

Natures That Are Bruised Because They Will Not Be Thrashed—Human Mistakes.

BROOKLYN, June 11.—Rev. Dr. Talmage closed his early service today with "The Threshing Machine," the text being from Isaiah xxvii, 27, 28, "For the threshing instrument shall reap the corn, and the shocks shall be beaten out with a staff, and the ears of the threshing instrument shall be broken out with a staff, and the ears of the threshing instrument shall be broken out with a staff."

There are three kinds of seed mentioned—fitches, cummin and corn. Of the last we all know. But it may be well to state that the fitches and the cummin were small seeds like the caraway or the chickweed. When these grains or herbs were to be threshed, they were thrown on the floor, and the workmen would come around with staff or rod or flail and beat them until the seed would be separated, but when the corn was to be threshed that was thrown on the floor, and the men would fasten horses or oxen to a cart with iron dent wheels. That cart would be drawn around the threshing floor, and so the work would be accomplished. Different kinds of threshing for different products. "The fitches are not threshed with a threshing instrument, neither is a cart wheel turned about upon the cummin, but the fitches are beaten out with a staff and the cummin with a rod. Broad corn is threshed because he will not ever be threshing it."

THE THRASHING PROCESS.

The great thought that his text pressed upon our souls is that we all go through some kind of threshing process. The fact that you may be devoting your life to honorable and noble purposes will not win you any escape. Wilberforce, the Christian emancipator, was in his day derisively called "Dr. Cartwheel." Thomas Bainton Macaulay, the advocate of all that was good long before he became the most conspicuous historian of his day, was caricatured in one of the quarterly reviews as "Babbalanja Macaulay." Norman Macleod, the great friend of the Scotch poor, was industriously maligned in all quarters, although on the day when he was carried out to his burial a weaverman stood and looked at the funeral procession and said, "If he had done nothing for anybody more than he has done for me, he should shine as the stars forever and ever." All the small wits of London had their thing at John Wesley, the father of Methodism.

If such men could not escape the maligning of the world, neither can you expect to get rid of the sharp, keen stings of the tribulation. All who will live fully in Christ Jesus must suffer persecution. Besides that there are the sicknesses, and the bankruptcies, and the irritations, and the disappointments which are ever getting a cup of aloes to your lips. These wrinkles on your face are hisrodipies which, if deciphered, would make out a thrilling story of trouble. The footstep of the rabbit is seen the next morning on the snow, and on the white hairs of the aged are footprints showing where swift trouble alighted.

Even amid the joys and hilarities of life trouble will sometimes break in. As when the people were assembled in the Charleston theater during the Revolutionary war and while they were witnessing a farce and the audience was in great gratulation the guns of an advancing army were heard and the audience broke up in wild panic and ran for their lives, so oftentimes while you are seated amid the joys and festivities of this world you hear the cannonade of some great disaster. All the fitches, and the cummin, and the corn must come down on the threshing floor and be pounded.

My subject, in the first place, teaches us that it is no compliment to us if we escape great trial. The fitches and the cummin on the threshing floor might look over to the corn on another threshing floor and say: "Look at that poor, miserable, bruised corn. We have only been a little pounded, but that has been almost destroyed." Well, the corn, if it had lips, would answer and say: "Do you know the reason you have not been so much pounded as I have? It is because you are not of so much worth as I am. If you were, you would be as severely run over."

Yet there are men who suppose they are the Lord's favorites simply because their barns are full, and their bank account is flush, and there are no funerals in the house. It may be because they are fitches and cummin, while down at the end of the line the poor widow may be the Lord's corn. You are but little pounded because you are but little worth, and she bruised and ground because she is the best part of the harvest.

The gift of the threshing machine is according to the value of the grain. If you have not been much threshed in life perhaps there is not much to thresh. If you have not been much shaken of trouble, perhaps it is because there is going to be a very small yield. When there are plenty of blackberries, the gatherers go out with large baskets, but when the drought has almost consumed the fruit there is a quart measure will do as well. It took the venomous snake on Paul's hand and the pounding of him with stones until he was taken up for dead, and the journeying against him of prison gates, and the Ethiopian vociferation, and the skinned ankles of the painful stocks, and the flogging of the Alexandrian corn ship, and the beating strokes of the Roman sheriff to bring Paul to his proper development.

It was not because Robert Moffat and Lady Rachel Russell and Frederick Oberlin were worse than other people that they had to suffer; it was because they were better and God wanted to make them better. By the carefulness of the threshing you may always measure the value of the grain.

HOW TO MEASURE THE MEASURE.

Next my text teaches us that God proportioned our trials to what we can bear. The staff for the fitches, the rod for the cummin, the iron wheel for the corn.

Sometimes people in great trouble say, "Oh, I can't bear it!" But you did hear it. God would not have sent it upon you if he did not know that you could bear it. You trembled, and you swooned, but you got through. God will not take from your eyes one tear too many, nor from your lungs one sigh too deep, nor from your temples one throb too sharp. The perplexities of your earthly business have not in them one tangle too intricate. You sometimes feel as if our world were full of bludgeoning flying haphazard. Oh, no; they are threshing instruments that God just suits to your case. There is not a dollar of bad debts on your ledger, or a disappointment about goods that you expected to go up, but that have come down, or a swindle of your business partner, or a trick on the part of those who are in the same kind of business that you are, but God intended to overrule for your immortal help. "Oh," you say, "there is no need talking that way to me. I don't like to be cheated and outraged." Neither does the corn like the corn thrasher, but after it has been threshed and winnowed it has a great deal better opinion of winnowing mills and corn thrashers.

"Well," you say, "if I could choose my troubles I would be willing to be troubled." Ah, my brother, then it would not be trouble. You would choose something that would not hurt, and unless it hurts it does not get sanctified. Your trial perhaps may be childlessness. You are fond of children. You say, "Why does God send children to that other household, where they are unwelcome and are beaten and bawled about, when I would have taken them in the arms of my affection?" You say, "Any other trial but this." Your trial perhaps may be a disfigured countenance or a face that is easily caricatured, and you say, "Oh, I could endure anything if only I was good looking." And your trial perhaps is a violent temper, and you have to drive it like six untamed horses amid the gunpowder explosions of a great holiday, and ever and anon it runs away with you. Your trial is the asthma. You say, "Oh, if it were rheumatism or neuritis or erysipelas, but it is this asthma, and it is such an exhausting thing to breathe." Your trouble is a husband, short, sharp, snappy and cross about the house and raising a small riot because a button is off! How could you know the button is off?

Your trial is a wife ever in contest with the servants, and she is a sloven. Though she was very careful about her appearance in your presence once, now she is careless, because she said her fortune is made. Your trial is that school lesson you cannot learn, and you have bitten your finger nails until they are a sight to behold. Everybody has some vexation or annoyance or trial, and he or she thinks it is the one least adapted. "Anything but this," all say. "Anything but this."

Oh, my hearer, are you not ashamed to be complaining all this time against God? Who manages the affairs of this world anyhow? Is it an infinite Modoc, or a Sitting Bull savage, or an omnipotent Nana Sahib? No, it is the most merciful and glorious and wise Being in all the universe. You cannot teach Omnipotence anything. You have fretted and worried almost enough. Do you not think so? Some of you are making yourselves ridiculous in the sight of the angels.

Here is a naval architect, and he draws out the plan of a ship of many thousands tons. Many workmen are engaged on it for a long while. The ship is done, and some day, with the flag up and the air gorged with bunting, that vessel is launched for Southampton. At that time a lad 6 years of age comes running down the dock with a toy boat which he has made with his own jackknife, and he says: "Here, my boat is better than yours. Just look at this fibrous and these weather cross in its bow," and he drops his little boat beside the great ship, and there is a roar of laughter on the docks.

Alas, my friends, that great ship is your life as God planned it—vast, million-tonned, ocean destined, eternity bound. That little boat is your life as you are trying to live it out and fashion it and launch it. Ah, do not try to be a rival of the great Jehovah. God is always right, and in nine cases out of ten you are wrong. He sends just the hardships, just the bankruptcies, just the crosses that it is best for you to have. He knows what kind of grain you are, and he sends the right kind of threshing machine. It will be a rod or staff or iron wheel just according as you are fitches or cummin or corn.

THE WHEAT AND THE CHAFF.

Again, my subject teaches us that God keeps trial on us until we let go. The farmer shouts "whoa!" to his horses as soon as the grain has dropped from the stalk. The farmer comes with his fork and tosses up the straw, and he sees that the straw has let go the grain and the grain is thoroughly threshed. So God. Smiting rod and turning wheel both cease as soon as we let go. We hold on to this world with its pleasures and riches and amusements, and our knuckles are so firmly set that it seems as if we could hold on forever. God coming along with some threshing trouble and beats us loose.

We started under the delusion that this was a great world. We learned out of our geography that it was so many thousand miles in diameter and so many thousand miles in circumference, and we said, "Oh, my, what a world!" Troubles came in after life, and this trouble sliced off one part of the world, and that trouble sliced off another part of the world, and it has got to be a smaller world, and in some of your estimations a very insignificant world, and it is depreciating all the time as a spiritual property. Ten per cent off, 50 per cent off, and there are those here who would not give 10 cents for this world—for the entire world—as a soul possession.

We thought that friendship was grand thing. In school we used to write compositions about friendship, and perhaps we made our graduating speech on some momentous day on friendship. Oh, it was a cherished thing! But does it mean as much to you as it used to? You have gone on in life, and one friend has betrayed you, and another friend has misinterpreted you, and another friend has neglected you, and friendship comes now sometimes to mean to you merely another way to grind!

So with money. We thought if a man had a competency he was safe for all the future, but we have learned that a mortgage may be defeated by an unknown previous incumbrance, that signing your name on the back of a note may be your business death warrant, that a new tariff may change the current of trade, that a man may be ruined

today and poor tomorrow. And God, by all these misfortunes, is trying to loosen our grip, but still we hold on. God smites us with a staff, but we hold on. And he strikes us with a rod, but we hold on. And he sends over us the iron wheel of misfortune, but we hold on. There are men who keep their grip on this world until the last moment who suggest to me the condition and conduct of the poor Indian in the boat in the Niagara rapids coming on toward the fall. Seeing that he could not escape, a moment or two before he got to the verge of the plunge he lifted a wine bottle and drank it off and then tossed the bottle into the air. So there are men who clutch the world, and they go down through the rapids of temptation and sin, and they hold on to the very last moment of life, drinking to their eternal damnation as they go over and go down.

Oh, let go! Let go! The best fortunes are in heaven. There are no absconding cashiers from that bank, no failing in promises to pay. Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth. Let go! Depend upon it that God will keep upon you the staff, or the rod, or the iron wheel until you do let go.

THE STAFF AND THE ROD.

Another thing my text teaches us is that Christian sorrow is going to have a sure terminus. My text says, "Broad corn is threshed because he will not be over threshing it." Blessed be God for that! Pound away, O flail. Turn on, O wheel! Your work will soon be done. "He will not be over threshing it." Now the Christian has almost as much use in the organ for the stop tremulant as he has for the trumpet. But after awhile he will put the last dirge into the portfolio forever. So much of us as is wheat will be separated from so much as is chaff, and there will be no more need of pounding.

They never cry in heaven because they have nothing to cry about. There are no tears of bereavement, for you shall have your friends all round about you. There are no tears of poverty because each one sits at the king's table and has his own chariot of salvation and free access to the wardrobe where princes get their array. No tears of sickness, for there are no pneumonias on the air, and no malarial exhalations from the rolling river of life, and no crutch for the lame limb, and no splint for the broken arm, and the pulses throbbing with the health of the eternal God in a climate like our June before the blossoms fall, or our gorgeous October before the leaves scatter.

In that land the souls will talk over the different modes of threshing. Oh, the story of the staff that struck the fitches, and the rod that beat the cummin, and the iron wheel that went over the corn! Daniel will describe the lions, and Jonah will describe the fish, and the wood whips with which he was scourged, and Eve will tell how aromatic Eden was the day she left it, and John Rogers will tell of the smart of the flame, and Elijah of the fiery team that wheeled him up the steep, and Christ of the numbness and paroxysm and hemorrhages of the awful crucifixion. There they are before the throne of God. "On one elevation all those who were struck of the staff. On a higher elevation all those who were struck of the rod. On a highest elevation, and amid the highest altitudes of heaven, all those who were under the wheel. He will not ever be threshing it."

Oh, my hearers, is there not enough salve in this text to make a plaster large enough to heal all your wounds? When a child is hurt, the mother is very apt to say to it, "Now, it will soon feel better." And that is what God says when he unbosoms all the trouble in the hush of this great promise, "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." You may leave your pocket handkerchief soppy wet with tears on your death pillow, but you will go up absolutely sorrowless. They will wear black; you will wear white. Cypress for them; palms for you.

You will say: "Is it possible that I am here? Is this heaven? Am I so pure now I will never do anything wrong? Am I so well that I will never again be sick? Are these companionships so firm that they will never again be broken? Is that Mary? Is that John? Is that my loved one I put away into darkness? Can it be that these are the faces of those who lay so worn and emaciated in the back room on that awful night dying? Oh, how radiant they are! Look at them! How radiant they are!"

"Why, how unlike this place is from what I thought when I left the world below! Ministers drew pictures of this land, but how tame compared with the reality! They told me on earth that death was sunset. No, no! It is sunrise! Glorious sunrise! I see the light now purpling the hills, and the clouds flame with the coming day."

Then the gates of heaven will be opened, and the entranced soul, with the autenseness and power of the celestial vision, will look ten thousands of miles down upon the bannered procession—a river of shimmering splendor—and will cry out, "Who are they?" And the angel of God standing close by will say, "Don't you know who they are?" "No," says the entranced soul, "I cannot guess who they are." The angel will say, "I will tell you, then, who they are. These are they who came out of great tribulation, or threshing, and had their robes washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb."

DRINK OF CELESTIAL ANODYNE. Oh, that I could administer some of these drops of celestial anodyne to those nervous and excited souls. If you would take enough of it, it would cure all your pains. The thought that you are going to get through with this after awhile—all this sorrow and all this trouble. We shall have a great many grand days in

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houses, but I will tell you which will be the grandest day of all the million ages of heaven. You say, "Are you sure you can tell me?" Yes, I can. It will be the day we get there. Some say heaven is growing more glorious. I suppose it is, but I do not care much about that. Heaven now is good enough for me.

History has no more gratulatory scene than the breaking in of the English army upon Lucknow, India. A few weeks before a massacre had occurred at Cawnpore, and 500 women and children had been put in a room. Then five professional soldiers went in and shot them. Then the bodies of the slain were taken out and thrown into a well. As the English army came into Cawnpore they went into the room, and oh, what a horrid scene! Sword strokes on the wall near the floor, showing that the poor things had crouched when they died, and they saw also that the floor was ankle deep in blood. The soldiers walked on their heels across it lest their shoes be submerged of the carnage. And on that floor of blood there were flowing locks of hair and fragments of dresses.

Out in Lucknow they had heard of the massacre, and the women were waiting for the same awful death, waiting amid anguish untold, waiting in pain and starvation, but waiting heroically, when one day Havelock and Outram and Norman and Sir David Baird and Peel, the heroes of the English army—lunatic for them!—broke in on that horrid scene, and while yet the guns were sounding, and while cheers were issuing from the starving, dying people on the one side and from the travel worn and powder blackened soldiers on the other, right there in front of the king's palace there was such a scene of handshaking and embracing and boisterous joy as would utterly confound the pen of the poet and the pencil of the painter.

And no wonder, when these emaciated women, who had suffered so heroically for Christ's sake, marched out from their incarcerations, one wounded English soldier got up in his fatigue and wounds and leaned against the wall and threw his cap up and shouted, "Three cheers, my boys, for the brave women!"

Oh, that was an exciting scene! But a gladder and more triumphant scene will be when you come up into heaven from the conflicts and incarcerations of this world, streaming with the wounds of battle and with hunger. And while the hosts of God are cheering their great hosanna you will strike hands of congratulation and eternal deliverance in the presence of the throne. On that night there will be bonfires every hill of heaven, and there will be illumination in every palace, and there will be a candle in every window. Ah, no; I forget, I forget. They will have no need of the candle or of the sun, for the Lord God giveth them light, and they shall reign forever and ever. Hail, hail, sons and daughters of the Lord God Almighty!



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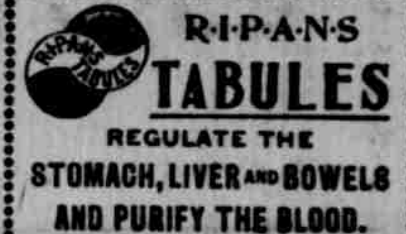
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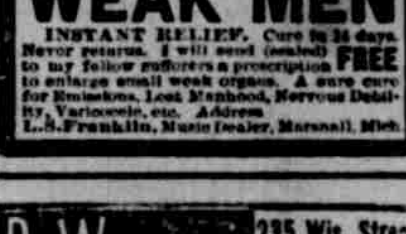
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